

## SOMETHING OF LYME AND THE ARTISTS

Old Lyme — a pleasant name for a pleasant village, rambling along the banks of the little rivers which empty into the broad Connecticut — that great waterway in turn, kicks up a fine rum-pus when it meets the Sound, as the sail-boats know full well, when they try to cross the Rip. Between the Gay Nineties and the Great War, the grand old town had many a chance to throw back its head and hold its sides with laughter, real laughter from the boots up, right through the heart. None of this alcoholic stuff of modern days, for Lyme allowed no liquor within its limits, and to get it one must go by ferry on the "Lady Fenwick" to Saybrook.

An artist, by the name of Henry W. Ranger, had a house for a summer near the Golden Spur and was urged by a friend to come to Lyme, with the suggestion that Miss Florence Griswold, who lived in a big, white pillared house, might take him in. That proved to be the beginning of a dozen years of the gayest, hardest working artist's Paradise New England has ever produced. Ranger had a flair for attracting interesting people, and being a dictator in a quiet way collected artists, musicians and the literary minded about him. He made an agreement with Miss Griswold, that he and the other artist boarders, should look over any applicants for the honor of residing in her house and pass on their eligibility. Female students, called "Blots," had to find habitations at the other end of the village, the deadline was the Post Office and general store, kept by Mr. Will Clark, who sold Phosa and had a great flair for pronouncing words just a little on the bias in speaking of a certain lady's érmine, as "Mrs. T's Vermin Mantel," and again of someone who had gone to "Nausea," when he meant Nassau. One day he was asked if he kept stockings, he answered, "Yes, beautiful hose" and held one up, "isn't that a fine hoe?" Another time, Mr. Warner was expecting a Special Delivery letter — it didn't come, and he was worried and went to Clark to ask if there was a letter for him. "Why yes, it's been here a long time." "Why didn't you send it up then?" said Mr. Warner. "I wasn't going to give it to anyone but you," answered Mr. Clark. "It's marked Special Delivery."

The lovely old house, built in 1818, Miss Florence inherited from her father, Capt. Robert Griswold. The four white pillars, which reach from the ground to the top of the second story windows, were each made of a great tree, floated down the rivers, all the way from Maine. The hall goes through to the back piazza and the door is widely hospitable. Large, high ceilinged rooms open right and left, each with its big fireplace and distinguished mantle. At the back door, a turn to the right, down a passage, leads to the dining room and beyond that, stretch the kitchen, woodshed, and so on, under the line of receding roofs. In those days, there was no running water in the house and each morning a pitcher of water was brought to every bedroom, the only room service provided, the guests did the rest, each looking after his own bed chamber, and if more water was needed, pulled up the

bucket from the well himself. No privacy was possible and the privy was reached through an enchanting lilac walk, in full view from the house. Childe Hassam painted one of his fine pictures of that lilac walk, but substituted a couple of nymphs for the architecture. Miss Florence was the life of the house, happy go lucky, always ready to get up a picnic, arbitrator of quarrels, and the first to lead the way to the abundant larder, which, night after night, was raided of its new made cakes and pies. The steps in front of the pillars led down the garden path, between arbor-vitae to the dirt road, where eight yoke of oxen would often pass, drawing wood or hay, as the season dictated. The houses were guarded by picket fences and the grass edges of the road were not cut.

Old Lyme originally was part of Saybrook when founded in 1635 and was made an independent plantation, at what was known as the "Loving Parting," Feb. 13, 1665. On May 9th, 1667, a decree of the General Court at Hartford authorized the change of name from East Saybrook to that of Lyme. It seems to have been a fairly peaceful village but there was a famous controversy in regard to a strip of land between Bride Brook and the Niantic River, which New London and Lyme agreed to "leave to Our Lord to settle," and appointed two champions for each side. For Lyme, they were, Matthew Griswold and William Ely, who fisticuffed their way to victory. This is I believe, cited as a test case in law-books today. No local Indian warfare has been recorded, though from a letter by Gov. Talcott in 1775, there were 163 Nehantics within the township.

Lyme took no chances and placed her first three churches one after the other, as each was outgrown, on what is still called Meeting House Hill, to guard against attack, for the Indians lived on the islands at the mouth of the Connecticut and could be seen from the Meeting House. From 1746 the township had a state monopoly in the manufacture of salt. In 1812, the British ascended the river as far as Essex, so earthworks were hastily thrown up for the protection of Lyme.

There was a deal of ship building both on the Connecticut and Lieutenant Rivers, and many a Lyme Captain sailed to the Orient and back with great profit.

Lyme originally covered 80 square miles and in 1855 the southwest portion withdrew and is now legally called Old Lyme.

The famous Congregational Church was erected on the green in 1816 by Col. Samuel Belcher from plans of an earlier London Church designed by Sir Christopher Wren. After standing ninety years it was destroyed by fire in 1907 but luckily some repairs were under way and the original plans were safe, and it could be exactly duplicated. This beautiful church has been made doubly famous by many artists, whose "paintings, etchings, illustrations and even magazine covers," have shown its beauty to the world.

Lyme was a small village when Mr. Ranger came to live at Miss Florence's, with hitching posts and mounting blocks in front of the houses and candles and lanterns to light the way. The

house was always filled to capacity and among the congenial groups were, Henry R. Poore, Alan Talcott, Will Howe Foote, his uncle William H. Howe, Frank DuMond, Clark Voorhees, Louis Paul Dessar, Jules Turcas, Frank Bicknell, Frederick Ramsdel and Louis Cohen; later came Harry Hoffman, Will Chadwick, Gifford Beal, Alphonse Jonger, a portrait painter and George Bogert.

Childe Hassam arrived in 1903 and Metcalf the next year. Robert Nesbit followed and fell in love with Mrs. Metcalf and later married her, though without disturbing friendly feelings.

Mr. Metcalf complained he never could get enough green peas. Miss Florence told him if he would shell them, he could have all he wanted. The gardener brought him a great basket and he spent all morning shelling enough to fill a large yellow bowl. At lunch not only he but everyone ate peas, ate and ate. One by one they came to the end and watched Mr. Metcalf, who at last was struggling with his bowlful, until finally even he had to give up and admit for once in his life he had eaten enough peas.

About this period, came Walter Griffin and Mrs. Griffin, known as a Tartar, Edward Rook, Tait McKensie, sculptor and Edward H. Pothast.

Childe Hassam was much annoyed by spectators when he was painting. He had a habit of taking off his shirt inspite of the mosquitos and working, hence "Hassam Pink," as he never tanned, only burned.

To continue the list, Carleton Wiggins, William Robinson, E. L. Warner, Charles Bitteringer, Thomas Ball, illustrator, whose son enjoyed the artistic conversations so much, he would hide under sofas, etc., had to be looked for, pulled out and sent to bed. Good training for a Congressman.

Later, Lois Wilcox, Katherine Langhorn Adams and Matilda Browne, the Woodhull Adams, Gregory Smith, Charles Ebert, Lucien Abrams and Clifford Grayson.

This list doesn't begin to cover famous artists, who have worked and lived and are living still in Lyme.

To go back to the older days, the men seemed to work harder and play harder and enjoy life with more zest than now. In those days, I've been told, there never was a bottle of liquor in the house, with the exception of a time when Mr. Hemming was very ill for three days and seemed to be getting worse. Several artists were headed for Essex sketching and Miss Florence asked them to bring back a bottle of Brandy, as she thought it might help him. Mr. Foote gave the patient a very small dose in half a glass of water and a few moments later as he responded to it, another small dose. Hemming was a teetotaler and had eaten nothing for three days, but the brandy really picked him up, and awhile later he appeared at the supper table, as gay as a lark and very talkative, much to the surprise of everybody. As he talked louder, someone reminded him ladies were present at the other table, so he rose, made a deep bow to Miss Florence and fled. Mr. Foote, the next morning, said to him, "those two little drinks I gave you couldn't possibly have made you feel this way," and Mr.

Hemming admitted he had taken another dose, just the same half glass Mr. Foote had poured out, but, straight brandy. He did not know Foote had added more than one half water.

There was a great deal of gay hearted practical joking, and all kinds of games. They had a ping pong table in the hall in front of Mr. Ranger's room, though no one was allowed to play until he gave the word. He liked to manage everything, but it wasn't resented, for he attracted interesting people, and everyone got along well, until he became a bit too dictatorial.

Spring and Autumn were the sketching seasons and every morning the artists went their several ways until lunch time, when there was an exhibition of all the work, and the sketches were stood up in the hall and discussed and criticised constructively. Work again until five, and then someone would suggest "dressing up" for supper, so off to the attic where Miss Florence kept trunks of costumes and all kinds of characters would appear at the table.

Many evenings were spent filling the famous Wiggle Book. A few lines on a paper were passed about among the men, and each had to draw a sketch including those lines. Many turned out to be real works of Art and hundreds of drawings were made. At first they were kept in a table drawer, but soon the good ones would disappear, and to save them, a book was started to paste them in, then of course it peetered out, as so often happens.

One evening Miss Beatrice Pope came to visit some friends, who were boarding in what was once the Old Tavern. It was dark when she arrived so as soon as she awoke, next morning, she went to the window to see what the country looked like, and to her amazement, she saw a procession coming toward her, in single file, men in top hats and pajamas, each with a musical instrument and playing and singing. They marched right to her window and gave her a welcoming serenade. That was her introduction to her future husband, who had gone to breakfast in that costume, and as each man came into the dining room, they caught the germ and did likewise. They had heard a pretty girl had come to visit, so off they marched to greet her.

In the earliest days women were not admitted at Miss Florence's. A couple of attractive, hard working, artistic ladies, pupils of Mr. Poore and incidently friends of Miss Pope, lived below the dead line. Mr. Poore, being sorry for them arranged to get them in the "Holy House." After that, a few wives joined their husbands, which worked all right, but when a family group arrived, that was the beginning of the end. In the dining room the men had to wear their coats, no matter how warm the weather became. The older and married ones didn't seem to mind. The men sat at one table and the women had their own. Beal, Voorhees, Foote and Hoffman, the younger crowd, asked if they could have a table on the back porch where they could sit in their shirt sleeves. The men in the house always had great discussions about Art during meals, which were very vehement and as the pros and cons for "studio painting" and "out door painting" etc. were

discussed, their voices got louder and louder. The men on the piazza, called themselves, the Hot Air Club, and as the voices rose inside, they (who made it a rule not to discuss art at table) raised their voices too, to egg on the others, just to get them up until all were screaming at the top of their lungs and Bedlam was let loose. Later the older men had their table brought out and of course the women followed suit, and it became the custom for all the meals in summer to be eaten out doors.

The Artists had a base ball team, which was most successful. Field Days, with various entries in costume, 100 yard dash. Paper medals, including a wonderful one for the fat man's race. Mr. Ranger wore knickerbockers of red, yellow and green plaid. Pitch Quoits was very popular and moonlight walks and picnics on the river.

Henry Poore painted a frieze over the fireplace, of a Fox-hunt, which was added to for several years and included the various artists in costume depicting special adventures.

Ranger and Poore painted a picture on Ranger's door, of the old Bow Bridge, Ranger on one panel and Poore put in the hound baying to the moon on the other.

On the living room door Louis Cohen painted the path to the gate, from the front door. "Uncle Howe" did a masterpiece of a bull. Miss Florence refused a good round sum for it. Matilda Browne, calves, Gifford Beal took the dining room door. After the door panels were used up, Metcalf suggested panels around the dining room, three of which he painted. Hassam, Warner, Chancy, Ryder, Wiggins, Hoffman, Foote, who did Miss Florence's house by moonlight, Hemming, Alonzo Kimbell, Henry Kenyon, Nesbit, Allan Talcott, Ball, and a panel, the result of a collaboration by Hassam, Griffin and Poore.

Some of the men had studios in the barn and near-by buildings. Hassam called his "Bonero Terrace." Mr. Poore found a victorian sofa, large and comfortable, to retain which, there was great competition. Hassam wanted it and took half the side of the house out to get it.

Hassam sent Miss Freeman a postal, which I have seen, dated, "Bonero Terrace, Oct. 1905," with a sketch of the sofa and carefully printed,

"Bonero Terrace is now refurnished — and for keeps!!!

Signed C. H.

For further details ask Poore."

In 1901 the first of the annual art exhibits was given in the Library by a group of artists, invited by the ladies of the Library Committee. They showed antiques and silver upstairs, and down stairs the walls and books were covered and the pictures hung there for four days, over Labor Day. Everyone entertained their friends from the surrounding towns, at luncheon, and it was such a success that the next year the artists asked to repeat it, and the exhibition was extended to a week. The light was poor and

the walls inadequate, but the pictures were good, so the exhibitions and accompanying teas became annual fixtures and now in the new building, it is open and crowded for three months.

At first the Art Association thought of joining with the Town Hall, to erect a War Memorial and they collected \$2,000.00 in donations, toward it, but later it was thought better to build their own Gallery, so they divided the money, each taking \$1,000.00.

Lawton Parker showed them how to finance the gallery and wrote to many art buyers, asking each to give \$500.00 and receive a note for it and later choose a picture from the exhibition. They started from scratch and in two years it was so successful, they paid it all off.

This Association was the first to build its Gallery and have summer shows. Now, many towns have followed its example and have exhibitions from one end of New England to the other.

In 1920, on ground given by Joseph H. Huntington, a resident of Lyme, the Lyme Art Gallery was designed and constructed by the famous architect, Charles A. Platt, also a well known painter and etcher, who donated his services. It adjoined Miss Griswold's property and to the end of her life, she acted as hostess, did everything in her power to further its interests and her admiring enthusiasm sold many a picture for her friends.

The grey shingled building with its well lighted North and South Galleries and one toward the East for sketches is most agreeable. The first President was Judge Walter C. Noyes, for a couple of years, next the artist, Mr. Howe, for one, and then Mr. William Owen Goodman of Chicago, an art patron, who was interested from the start. He was Vice President of the Chicago Art Institute, to which he gave a very fine theatre. In Lyme, he gave a prize for a number of years and was always most generous. When he died two years ago, Mr. Goodman gave the Association \$5,000.00, with which they built the Goodman Memorial Gallery opening out from the sketch room, with a balcony looking over the pond.

When Mr. Edwin P. Norwood took the position of Manager, he started a guest book of the visitors to the Gallery, and found at the end of its first year, every State in the union had been represented, but one. The next year the first person to register was from the missing state, Utah.

The original crowd, who painted, were:

Henry W. Ranger — painter of oak trees in rich autumnal browns, Barbazon type.

Henry R. Poore — Hounds, horses, cattle.

Alan Talcott — landscape, a la Ranger.

William H. Howe — animal painter, known as "Uncle," had quite a vogue at one time, of which there is a particularly good example in the Chicago Art Institute.

Frank Du Mond — taught at Chase School and then the Art Students League, did murals and landscapes and is a good teacher.

Will Howe Foote — portraits, landscapes, figures, very fine colorist.

Clark Voorhees — landscaping and etching.

Louis Paul Dessar — oak trees, sheep, big vogue at one time, had a system idealistic landscape.

Carleton Wiggins — sheep and cattle.

Louis Cohen — same school as Ranger.

Walter Griffin — landscapes very good, impressionist.

Frederick Ramsdel — lecturer, keen mind.

They were later augmented by:

Harry Hoffman — undersea and landscape, flowers, colorist.

Will Chadwick — landscape and portraits.

Gifford Beal — sea, circus, Hudson River. Water-colors, etchings.

Childe Hassam — figures, landscape, New York, flags, rain, laurel, etchings. So well known, no further description is necessary.

Willard L. Metcalf — landscapes and illustrating for magazines when young. A widely known painter.

Robert Nesbit — etcher, some good landscapes of brooks.

Edward Rook — still life, landscape. Carnegie Medal, etc.

Alphonse Jonger — portrait painter. His portrait of Miss Florence, bought by the artists, hangs in the Gallery.

Tait McKensie — sculptor.

Jules Turcas — Landscapes.

Edward H. Pothast — landscape and beach pictures.

William Robinson — Laurel and boats and landscapes.

E. L. Warner — Snow, Pittsburgh and locomotives.

George Bogert — Venetian moonrises etc.

Charles Bittinger — printed interiors.

Bruce Crane — School of painting in studio. Early things very nice. All about the same, cool one or a warm one.

Guy Wiggins — Landscape, snow in New York. Later trend modernistic.

Percival Rosseau — Early figure things and later famous for his dogs.

George Burr — Figure and landscape, good etcher. Very talented.

Clifford Grayson — One time good painter. Won prizes in Philadelphia.

Lucien Abrams — admirer of Renoir. Modern trend.

Charles Ebert — Landscape and boats.

Edward Gregory Smith — Beautiful moonlights and land-

scapes. Subtile, splendid painter and teacher. Lovely sense of design.

Eugene Higgins — Gloom and peasants.

Henry Seldon — Landscape. Good water color painter.

Edward Volkert — Oxen painter, brilliant sunlight.

Wilson H. Irvine — Prism. Painted a good deal abroad.

Robert Vonnoh — Portraits.

Platt Hubbard — Portraits and landscapes. Especially known for his etching of trees.

Bessie Potter Vonnoh — Sculptor.

Lydia Longacre — Miniatures.

Matilda Browne — Cattle.

Ivan G. Olinsky — Portraits. Former President of Art Student League.

And the end is not yet.

One hears amusing stories of the old days, little incidents that tickle the fancy and are characteristic.

The Woodrow Wilsons spent a summer at Miss Florence's and one evening, when a raid had been made on the attic, Walter Griffin came down dressed as a bum, with lipstick on his nose and cheeks, Harry Hoffman as an organ grinder, Chadwick in a red lined cloak and high stock and Jessie Wilson in a couple of draped bedspreads, making a wonderful Greek Costume, so that her mother exclaimed, "Why just look, isn't Jessie beautiful."

Visitors to Lyme were always interested in seeing the artists and sometimes Miss Ludington would bring her guests to call, which she did one day after lunch, while everyone was sitting on the front steps before they went off painting. Chadwick looked up and saw the band of sightseers, let out a yell, threw up his hands, shot from his chair and was last seen in the direction of the river, followed by every artist in the place. Miss Ludington was horrified at such rudeness and turned to apologize, but to her surprise the ladies were enchanted with the spectacle. It was just what they imagined artists might do.

There was a very beautiful old oak in a nearby field, a number of the men had painted, Talcott, Metcalf, and several others. One of the canvasses was sold for a good price and the farmer, hearing of it, thought he should come in on the deal and sent over word, if anyone wanted to paint his oak, they must pay him ten dollars. There was a feeling of antagonism among the farmers, against painter men in general, for inspite of warnings, the pupils and art students would throw away paint rags and the cows would eat them and die.

Miss Florence was devoted to cats and never felt she owned too many. They ranged from twenty to thirty, according to the season of the year. A young artist, Gregory Smith, having just arrived the night before and wishing to explore this new to him, artistic community, walked down to the old Bow Bridge at sunset. He saw two artists leaning on the rail of the bridge, looking down



into the water, as he assumed, lost in the beauties of the reflections. As he came up with them he greeted them differentially in that vein, and was rather surprised when Mr. Robinson looked up, nodded, made some indifferent answer and immediately resumed his peering, but not so artistically minded, as Mr. Smith promptly found out. They were watching to see the gunny sack, full of unwanted cats, did not burst and allow any of the surreptitiously captured felines to escape.

Mr. Rook lived up Sill Lane, not far from the Griswold house and in those days every householder was his own garbage collector, so he dug a pit, which was soon discovered by the rats, who dug tunnels into it and feasted. Mr. Rook to get even with them, fastened a piece of glass against each hole and said, "That is to tantalize them. They can see it but cannot eat it." — Rook had a portable tub, which he carried to any room, warm enough to bathe in. One cold day he had it in the kitchen, and when he tried to carry it to the window to empty, he stumbled and it went all over the floor. He was overwhelmed and didn't know what to do, so rushed and got an auger and bored a hole and let the water into the cellar. — He had a ham that had outgrown its usefulness so he hung it from the limb of a tree, high enough to be out of reach of the foxes, but well surrounded by bullbriars, hoping, he said, "when the fox jumped for it, the briars would catch his fur," which he could later collect and make into paint brushes.

Alan Talcott, who was not as hard up as most of the other men, but had a touch of the Scotch in his make-up, had the finest motor and the best motor boat and would take the men on jaunts. One day, Hassam and Hemming went with him, down the Lieutenant and up the Connecticut River to Hamburg Cove. After that long run, he needed gas and as he came up to the dock, asked for two gallons. Hassam called out, "Oh, fill her up. I'll pay for it." Talcot beamed and turned his back, whereupon Hassam sneaked Talcott's wallet out of his coat, which he'd left on a seat, so unbeknownst, the owner was the payer afterall.

There are many stories about Mrs. Salisbury. She was an extraordinary character, who looked like Queen Victoria, very small and stocky, with bright pink cheeks. Her father had been Ambassador to Austria and she admired the regal life and was very much of a despot herself. She adored Lyme and did a great deal for the village in her own way. She gave money to the Library and school and tied it all up in bowknots, making one of the most complicated wills ever filed in Connecticut. The doctor told her she must take carriage exercise so she had a rope tied from the victoria around her waist and holding a couple of straps, walked behind the carriage, which the coachman drove slowly up the street.

She dearly loved china, all kinds, good, bad and indifferent. I know for I helped arrange her collection though I never met her. She would call on a friend, admire a choice piece and take it

home with her, unless the owner was especially clever, for just a protest wouldn't work.

If she gave an invitation she expected it to be accepted, like royalty, no previous engagement could take precedence.

Mrs. Salisbury went to call, one day, on Mrs. Huntington. The maid showed her into the parlor and went to announce her. Mrs. Salisbury noticed a lovely piece of Lowestoft on top of a highboy, so she dragged a chair to it and reached up and pulled it toward her. Just as Mrs. Huntington entered, the bowl tipped and to her consternation sprayed her with a stream of sticky cough syrup.

Another character of those days was Bishop William T. Sabine, of the Reformed Episcopal Church, who lived next door to Miss Griswold. He was a strict verbatim believer in the old Testament, and the dreary Sundays his family of ten suffered, were sympathized with, by the whole village. Between prayers and church one Sunday, he was greatly disturbed by a Hurdy Gurdy, which stopped to play in front of his house. He immediately ordered the Italian to move away, so the Hurdy Gurdy was trundled next door and soon had all the artists about him. They promptly gave him a dollar to go back and play all his tunes for the Bishop, who this time couldn't get rid of him, until the entire collection had been ground out.

And so it went, hard work and hard play. Many artists who have come and gone and many now living in Lyme and Hamburg, I've had no chance to speak of, but they have made the village famous, and loved the country and immortalized it in their work. Now the oxen have almost vanished, while the motors, electric lights and telephones have changed the town, from its simple life to a more hurried and perhaps less exuberant Art Center.